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Testimony on SB 366: An Act Requiring Licensed Social Workers and Counselors to Complete Continuing Education Coursework in Cultural Foundations

**Public Health Committee Hearing
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Submitted by: Stephen A. Karp, MSW**

The National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut chapter offers our support and suggestions on SB 366. We recognize the importance of assuring of a health care provider workforce that is culturally competent and believe that this bill moves us in that direction. We recommend that licensees attain at least one hour per licensure renewal in education related to cultural competence.

An understanding of cultural diversity is a key factor to successful prevention and treatment within health care. As social workers we embrace this concept as documented in the profession's formal education in bachelor and master level education, as well as ongoing continuing education programs. Cultural diversity is embedded within all major coursework for the social work degree. Likewise, NASW/CT regularly offers workshops related to cultural competence.

The *NASW Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice*, 2001, states "Social workers shall advocate for and participate in educational and training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession." These standards speak to the importance our profession places on culturally competent practice and the recognition that education on cultural competence is career long learning with continuing education hours a primary vehicle for such learning.

To make this requirement fully effective we strongly urge the Public Health Committee to include a requirement that the Department of Public Health audit at least 5% of all license renewals that include attestation of continuing education. We realize that 5% is not a high percentage however it is far better than the 0% that is now in place. The Social Work Board for the State of Missouri went to a 100% audit of continuing education and discovered that 40% of renewals had not completed continuing education. It is unfortunate realities that some licensed individuals ignore the continuing education requirements for license renewal knowing that they will never be asked for proof of continuing education. Auditing assures that SB 366 is not easily skirted by licensed practitioners who may believe that they are not in need of further education on diversity and cultural competence.

SB 366 covers Licensed Master Social Workers (LMSW). We have no issue with including the LMSW but will note that this level of licensure is in statute only. The LMSW has not yet been implemented thus new MSW graduates will not need to attain continuing education in cultural competence until they attain the Clinical license or upon such time that the LMSW is implemented. The Department of Public Health (DPH) had funding in the current fiscal year to begin the LMSW however that funding was rescinded in January due to DPH having not completed hiring of a staff person.

Finally, we urge the Public Health Committee to expand the requirements for continuing education in cultural competence to all licensed health care personnel that have continuing education requirements. SB 366 is a good start in that it captures most licensed mental health providers however the rationale for this bill is equally applicable to physical health care providers.